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OFFICIAL PUBLICATION
"THE MONTANA SHERIFF"

Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association

March 31, 1993

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Ms. Donna Searcy, Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street NW, Room 222
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: PR Docket No. 92-235

Dear Ms. Searcy:

The Montana Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (MSPOA) would like to submit comments in response to the above-captioned docket, the FCC's proposed Part 88. As the statewide association of sheriffs, the MSPOA represents all fifty-six (56) counties in Montana and actively works to influence issues which impact all law enforcement. Montana sheriffs are responsible for law enforcement across vast, often sparsely populated regions of this state. Our radio systems are critically important for protection of the lives and property of all Montana citizens and visitors to our state.

We are large users of private land mobile radio (PLMR) systems. Our primary systems are based on VHF high band mobile relays, often sited high above average terrain for the most cost-effective coverage. As a group, Montana sheriffs operate 69 mobile relays in the police radio service, covering over 100,000 square miles of varied forest, agricultural, and residential area. We use an additional 70 mobile relays licensed in the local government and fire radio services for countywide or rural operations. Over 4000 mobile units are used on these systems.

Impact

The Commission's proposed rules would have a major financial impact on our operations. Emitted radiated power (ERP) reductions based on transmitter height above average terrain (HAAT) would require us to add an estimated 250 more mobile relays to cover the same area we do today. We conservatively estimate the Commission's proposed rules effective January 1, 1996 would cost Montana sheriff offices \$4.3 million. In

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addition, our counties would face a comparable cost for modification of other systems we use, plus significantly increased operational expenses by virtue of having dramatically more sites to manage. All told, Montana counties would face a \$10 million bill by 1996.

Beyond the prohibitive costs of accommodating new power limitations, we are convinced that transmitter deviation reductions will, as proposed, limit the range of existing systems, reduce audio power output, and jeopardize the effectiveness of paging systems used widely. These relatively inexpensive transmitter modifications would adversely affect system performance, requiring additional fixed infrastructure and new equipment optimized for narrower channels.

These investments, if they can be seen as such, would be made obsolete by the year 2012 when the Commission's proposed narrow-band rules would become effective in Montana. We cannot estimate the cost of accommodating those rules since technology is not yet available to provide comparable levels of service. Nonetheless, the changes required by 1996 would severely impede our ability to build entirely new systems twenty years from now.

Recommendations

1. We recommend Part 88 be modified to eliminate ERP/HAAT limitations for public safety and replace them with service area coverage limitations. Montana sheriffs need radio coverage throughout our jurisdictions. Whether this coverage is provided by one or several mobile relays is largely an economic issue. We can and do tailor coverage to most effectively serve our needs.

planning. Police and local government frequency coordination is accomplished today through individuals familiar with our systems and needs. We would like to see all public safety coordination provided for in a similar and unified manner.

4. Finally, we recommend the Commission adopt a method by which regional public safety plans can be developed and given the force of law as has worked so well in the NPSPAC 800 MHz allocations nationwide. The National Public Safety Plan - Region 25 (Montana) process demonstrated our ability to cooperatively manage spectrum under broad FCC guidelines. We support similar initiatives which may influence bands more widely used in Montana.

Summary

The Montana Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association generally